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AUTHOR Meixner, Sylvia
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ABSTRACT

As a result of rapid growth and changes in the student body, the Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD) has been engaged in a complete review and revision of its educational system since 1978. As part of this process, the Arts and Sciences Task Force (ASTF) was formed in 1980 to revitalize the liberal arts and science. The ASTF has developed and begun to implement a Master Plan for the enhancement of arts and sciences. The goals of the Master Plan are to: (1) ensure that the MCCCD is dedicated to offering a quality college-level education; (2) foster the retention of students until their goals are achieved; (3) examine general education courses and degree requirements and revise as needed; (4) articulate general education and transfer degree requirements with other postsecondary institutions; and (5) ensure that district/college mission statements reflect the desired emphasis on arts and sciences. Among the most significant products of the ASTF is a detailed report and set of recommendations on degree requirements. The report recommends a common core, distribution requirements, electives and/or occupational courses, and a capstone course for two of the three degrees offered. The efforts of the ASTF are complemented by statewide activities to improve articulation and transfer, and the work of other task forces and groups in the District in the area of curriculum revision. Future focuses in the MCCCD are on adopting and implementing a final version of the new general education requirements, developing an instrument to assess needs and resources in the arts and sciences, improving articulation, and creating a public image better reflecting the quality of the arts and sciences curriculum. (LAL)

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A New Focus on Arts and Sciences at Maricopa

SYLVIA MEIXNER
CHAIR
MARICOPA DISTRICT
ARTS AND SCIENCES TASK FORCE

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A New Focus on Arts and Sciences at Maricopa

This issue of the **Bulletin** *was prepared by Sylvia Meixner, Chair, Maricopa District Arts and Sciences Task Force.*

The Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD), located in the Phoenix, Arizona metropolitan area, has grown from a single "junior" college wing of the local high school district in 1962 to an enrollment of more than 65,000 students. The third largest community college system in the nation, the district includes six campus-based colleges, a college without walls, and a skills center. Each college is independent, but the functions and missions are coordinated at the district level.

Reflecting national trends, students at the MCCCD have changed dramatically. The average age has increased, average family income has shrunk, the proportion of part-time students has risen, the average entry skills levels seems to have declined, and the interest of many students has moved increasingly away from liberal arts and transfer programs towards occupational programs.

The Arts and Sciences Task Force

As a result of this rapid growth and the changing student body, the MCCCD has been engaged in a complete review and revision of its educational system since 1978. In that year a Joint Council on Educational Priorities (JCEP) was created to direct this process, and it in turn created a series of councils, committees, commissions, and task forces to carry out this mission. Among the priorities identified by JCEP was "that general education and transfer courses retain their important place in the overall program of the colleges and that courses be developed or revised as changing needs dictate." The Arts and Sciences Task Force (ASTF), formed in 1980 to revitalize the liberal arts and science, has been both expanded and focused to address the issue of quality in all aspects of the arts and sciences.

Currently, the ASTF has a head and seven arms. Each college has its own task force to deal with college issues, as well as to provide ideas, information, and response to the district level task force. The college task forces are composed of faculty members and are

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chaired by a faculty member, but many have one or more administrators and support staff, such as research and development personnel, among their members.

Although membership in both district and college ASTFs changes each year, a continuing core has developed with a common set of concerns and goals. Each college has made significant changes. For example, several colleges have created their own five-year plans; one college now has a full-time year-round advisement center; two other colleges have advisement centers in the planning or pilot stages; four are involved in "Writing Across the Curriculum" projects, and one college has an "internationalizing the curriculum" project underway. Members have written a series of seven issue papers addressing specific concerns and suggesting directions for the future.

At both district and college levels, each task force has been deeply involved with district task forces and other groups. An assessment instrument for arts and sciences faculty has been created and will be used annually, much like an annual health examination, to provide early warning of problems, to indicate major strengths and to help with planning, both short and long range. The MCCCD Arts and Sciences Task Force and the college Arts and Science Task Force also determined to identify the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that should form the basis of common learning for all graduates of the Maricopa Colleges. The broad "competencies," were developed at each of the seven colleges and discussed in appropriate district committees.

ASTF Master Plan

With this background, the Arts and Sciences Task Force has developed and begun to implement a Master Plan for the enhancement of arts and sciences in the Maricopa Community Colleges. All of the work necessary to achieve the goals will be completed before the beginning of the 1985-86 academic year.

The goals of the Master Plan are to:

A. ensure that the Maricopa Community Colleges are dedicated to offering a quality college level education for the first two years of post-secondary education.

B. foster the retention of students until established student goals are achieved.

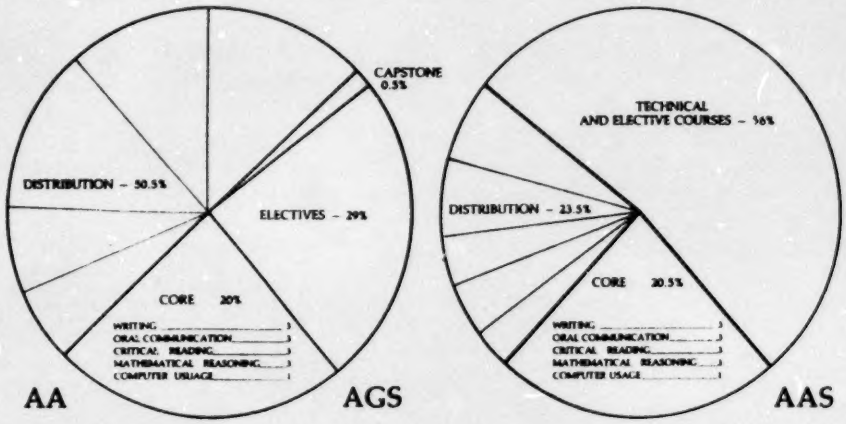
C. examine general education courses and degree requirements, and revise as needed.

D. articulate general education and transfer degree requirements with post-secondary institutions.

E. ensure that district/college mission statements reflect the desired emphasis on arts and sciences.

Among the most significant products of ASTF is a detailed report and set of recommendations on degree requirements with emphasis on general education as a portion of the activities implementing Goal C above. All three degrees – Associate in Arts (AA), Associate in General Studies (AGS), and Associate in Applied Science (AAS) traditionally offered in the Maricopa Community Colleges were retained. Each degree includes requirements in humanities, natural sciences, and social and behavioral sciences. Considerable discussion on the validity of the AGS degree took place, but its purpose was clarified and the degree itself strengthened. It now differs from the AA only in allowing a wider variety of courses to be sampled as part of the degree electives. The slightly wider latitude for this degree allows students who are initially uncertain about their educational goals to investigate several options without a serious loss of credits or time.

Briefly summarized, the report recommends: 1) a common core, 2) distribution requirements, 3) electives and/or occupational courses, and 4) a capstone course for two of the three degrees. The *common core* of courses designed to develop college-level skills is identical for all three degrees: a set of courses in college writing, reading, mathematical reasoning, oral communication, and computer usage. The writing and critical reading components must be completed before twenty-four college level credits have been accumulated, and students will be strongly advised to complete these core courses before they have achieved sixteen credits. Students may begin their college experience with one or more courses of special interest on a part-time basis, but cannot proceed toward a degree without developing the needed reading and writing skills.



In addition to the *common core*, each degree has a set of carefully designed *distribution requirements*. All students must take one course in advanced writing with research, although AAS degree candidates may take a different course, "Technical Writing." Each degree also has a physical well-being component that may be met by specified activity courses designed to enhance lifelong physical skills, or by specified courses in subjects such as nutrition, healthful living, or stress management.

The AA and AGS degrees include a *capstone interdisciplinary course* or seminar designed to allow students to integrate their knowledge. Before enrolling in this capstone experience, students must have completed the General Education core as well as at least three credit hours from each of

the following general education categories: Advanced Writing with Research, Humanities, Natural Science, and Social and Behavioral Sciences. Several multi-disciplinary capstone courses from which students may choose will be developed. These courses will cut across various general education categories, and not merely be interdisciplinary within only a single category.

For the AA and AGS degrees the requirements are eight to nine credits in humanities; seven to eight credits in natural science, of which at least one course must include a lab; and nine credits in social and behavioral sciences. The AAS (career program specified) degree requires fewer hours in the distribution areas (two to three credits in humanities; four credits in natural science courses which must include a lab; and three credits in social and behavioral sciences). For all three degrees, courses selected for distribution areas must meet general criteria, not be primarily for vocational training, and must fulfill the definition of each distribution area. The natural science area definition, for example, is "acceptable courses develop awareness of the laws, theories, and methods of inquiry used to explain the physical universe, its life forms, and its natural phenomena".

The ASTF report included a series of Recommendations for the Future. Among the most significant of these was "that a requirement of at least two semesters of a foreign language for the Associate of Arts degree be considered . . . " and that the district "increase the mathematics requirements in the core" as soon as feasible. The report also recommended the establishment of a system for periodic comprehensive review of general education requirements.

Since the implications of this report are so far-reaching, a full discussion of the recommendations, involving all concerned groups in the system, is now taking place. Further changes are still possible, although MCCCD has been extremely pleased with the thoughtful and comprehensive nature of this report and anticipates acceptance of most of its elements. The general education component of the three degrees will be much enhanced, and the elements of common learning will be clearer to faculty, students, and the community.

Transfer and Articulation

Arizona State University (ASU) receives more MCCCD graduates and former students than does any other institution of higher learning. Forty-four percent of *all* the full-time juniors at the ASU are transfers from the Maricopa Community Colleges. In the College of Business Administration, for example, fifty percent of all upper classmen are community college transfers, and the figure rises to ninety percent in the College of Engineering's Department of Technology.

Improvement of articulation is state policy. A joint committee of the Arizona Board of Regents and the State Board of Community Colleges has now set up the Academic Program Articulation Steering Committee. Alfredo G. de los Santos Jr., the Vice Chancellor for Educational Development at the Maricopa Colleges, chairs this important committee.

One of Maricopa's objectives has been to develop a degree that will guarantee that graduates transfer as juniors to a university without needing additional lower level courses – a "pure" transfer degree. Although many colleges within each of the three universities have not yet reached agreement among themselves, periodic discussions are being held with ASU's College of Education to develop common requirements for the first two college years. Discussions with other colleges at ASU will begin this fall.

Another area under discussion is the two-plus-two program articulation. The intent is to build at the university two additional years for two-year occupational programs – thus two-plus-two. MCCCD and ASU are actively designing such a degree now – the Industrial Supervision Bachelor of Science Degree – and other degree programs have already been selected for the next venture. Additionally, Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff now offers a Bachelor of General Studies Degree in Maricopa County into which MCCCD students will flow well.

Further, a community college representative will serve on each of the college curriculum committees at ASU, and a university representative on Maricopa's District Curriculum Committee. Alfredo de los Santos Jr. will sit on two university-wide committees – the University Curriculum Committee and the Academic Affairs Committee. The ASU Vice President for Academic Affairs, Jack B. Kissinger, will attend the meetings of the District Curriculum Committee. Other faculty/staff have been assigned to serve on the curriculum committee of five colleges of ASU.

Arizona has had a statewide course equivalency guide for a long time. Since this guide reflects only the three universities, as wholes, and *not* the colleges or departments *within* each university, there have always been some problems with the guide. Additionally, with all the curriculum changes taking place, it has been difficult to keep the guide up-to-date. A more accurate and detailed guide is a major goal, and an automatic computerized update will become part of it.

By Fall 1985 a statewide common numbering system for like courses will be in place. This will include common prefix, number, and title. The longer range goal, two to three years, is to add three more common elements for like courses: description, credits, and prerequisites.

Complementary Efforts at Maricopa

While the Arts and Sciences Task Forces were at work, other bodies of the Maricopa Community Colleges were also changing the educational system. For example, in the area of curriculum revision, over the last two years MCCCD has added 354 new courses and 75 new occupational programs, made major modifications in 221 courses and 259 programs, and is writing competencies for each of the 403 vocational programs. The curriculum is not merely growing, however; it is being pruned into a more

vigorous organism. One example has already been given—the Degree Requirements Subcommittee Report - which offers a definition for each area and a rationale for each decision. Another index of this careful reexamination is the curriculum review process, which has taken the unusual step of eliminating 218 courses and 54 programs as no longer useful or justified for this college district. Each of the colleges now has faculty members with special training in instructional design assigned to help other faculty and administrators in curriculum revision and in course delivery. The central office of the Maricopa District employs two-full time designers to oversee this process.

The Occupational Education Task Force shares several priorities with the Arts and Sciences Task Force. Among these are the need for better coordination of scheduled course offerings, a student tracking system, and improved advisement systems.

The Developmental Education Task Force is reorganizing the developmental education curriculum and the learning support system. It has developed a list of measurable basic skills that faculty expect of students prior to their entry into college-level courses. This list will be used for advisement, testing, placement, and the revision of the developmental courses. The task force is also working hard to improve Learning Assistance Centers now in place on five campuses, as well as the Instructional Materials and Library Centers.

For the most able students, MCCCD offers an Honors Program with special honors courses; honors credit in regular courses; faculty led informal honors clubs; and fourteen Honors Forums with such nationally known speakers as Grace Murray Hopper, a computer expert (the "Mother of Cobol"), and Edwin C. Newman. Honors Scholarships are also part of this program.

Future Plans

Major plans for 1984-85 include adopting and implementing the final version of the new general education requirements, the basic skills competencies, the recommendations of the Commission on Assessment and Placement, the new computerized Student Information System, and further improvement of advisement. These elements interlock, although each can be put in place separately from the others.

The Arts and Sciences Task Force plans to continue curriculum recommendations and support for the work of the other task forces. It will devote much of its time to administering an instrument designed to assess needs and resources in the arts and sciences, and to developing recommendations based on the results. This instrument will be administered to department and division chairs, who will discuss their responses with faculty members.

Three other areas will require considerable attention. First, Alfredo G. de los Santos, Jr., has asked ASTF to continue its participation in the process of articulation with Arizona colleges and universities. Second, community colleges around the nation have found that they are becoming, at best, one-year institutions. Since our students perform at a far higher level upon university transfer if they spend a full two-years in our colleges than if they transfer sooner, this is a significant problem. (Richardson, R.C. and Doucette, D.S. "The Transfer Function Alive and Well in Arizona." *Community and Junior College Journal, May, 1982.)*

Many changes now underway address this problem—curriculum reform, advisement, placement, tracking, intervention and follow-up, student-focused retention efforts, instructional design and, of course, articulation. Another element in reviving the sophomore year is better course scheduling, which must include better identification of student needs and goals and better coordination of schedules between departments. ASTF also plans to develop district-wide flexible guidelines, *beyond* numbers of students enrolled, in order to decide which courses to cancel and which to give the green light at the end of registration. The third focus is on creating a public image that better reflects the quality of the arts and science curriculum, and to make the community aware of the many changes taking place at Maricopa.

Conclusion

The overall vision to which all these multifaceted changes are directed centers on our students. Perhaps seeing our plan from the perspective of individual students will make our design clear. Entering students have heard about our program either from the media or from educational counselors who are now more aware of what we have to offer. Soon after they contact us, they meet with an advisor to clarify their goals, to take a series of tests, and to discuss the test results. Together they decide on an educational path, and a student information system helps to keep students and advisors aware of progress and roadblocks along the way. Well designed curricula and courses are available whether the students need help with basic skills, the challenge of honors work, or a program on a broader path. Excellent teachers guide them, a variety of services support them, and the best available instructional materials are in place. The advisor serves as a guide along each step.

When the students come to the end of the path with us, they have gained a core of carefully designed skills and knowledge common to all our graduates. They have been challenged to integrate the varied elements of their college experiences. They are ready for a smooth transition into the next level of education, whether at another school, in a career, or in the other tournaments of life.

The students are aware of our continuing interest after their departure, and continue to provide us with information for our tracking system to help us improve the process for their successors. They are inclined to return to us for further education, to enhance or add to their skills, and to enrich their spirit.

Designing such a system has been and continues to be an exciting challenge for everyone at the Maricopa Community Colleges.